

An Unhealthy America

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According to Dr. Maureen Braun, “By 2030, more than half of Americans could be obese” (Braun, 2012, p.1). With this high proportion of obesity, the number of health issues in our county and the economical statistics will be at astronomical numbers in only a few short years. The obesity rate continues to grow dramatically, even though health awareness is increasing as well. Do people really accept the information about health that they receive and apply it to their daily lives? While health education is important for society, it is not enough to reverse the rising trend of obesity and other health issues that develop because of obesity.

Unhealthy lifestyle choices result in health problems for those who fail to incorporate their health education into their daily lives. Some of these problems include obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, and the most overweight population the world has ever seen. Diabetes is the most talked about health concern when talking about eating nutritious foods. One of the biggest risk factors that causes diabetes is to be overweight and physically inactive. It can cause other problems, too, like high blood pressure, unhealthy cholesterol, and high blood sugar (Diabetes basics, 2012). This shows that even though diabetes and other problems are discussed in health education classes, people continue to ignore the information they are given and make unhealthy decisions that lead to them being overweight. They know that the decisions they are making will cause them health problems, but put aside that knowledge so that they can eat how they want to eat. This attitude, if continued, will cause Americans to grow even more overweight over time and result in more people having, diabetes, high blood sugar, and unhealthy cholesterol.

Not only do these poor choices cause millions of new health issues, but “ could cost the United States up to \$66 billion in treatment and over \$500 billion in lost economic productivity” (Preidt, 2011, p.1). Obesity is a drain on the US economy. The CDC has note that the total cost of obesity in the workplace is 72 billion dollars annually and 127 billion dollars in medical care. The total cost of obesity in America may be approaching 270 billion dollars and will most likely resume growing in the upcoming years. If these health selections continue to be made, the United States will consequently grow unhealthier and lose money that could be spent on a brighter American future. American poverty rates are the highest that they have been in years and some of this is due to spending money on unhealthy foods. This growing epidemic shows that current health awareness isn’t enough to reverse the trend of American lifestyles. Children and adolescents that are overweight are more likely to be overweight as adults and are at greater risk for many health problems. So not only will the current generation lose money for the country, but also the next generation. The habits that children are falling into will stay with them as they grow up and as they continue to spend money on their unhealthy habits. All of these effects will increase the cost of obesity in America and are drain our country’s economy of money (Childhood obesity facts, 2012).

According to Hayden Stewart’s study “Let’s Eat Out” almost three-quarters of the Americans surveyed usually eat out once a week. This is a major problem because it could be costing our country the millions of dollars that it needs for its economy. It also is a rising concern for health issues because most food that is consumed in fast food restaurants lacks nutritional quality and usually has high fat content. The reason that people choose unhealthily is because it is quick and easy to purchase and consume. The customer bases their decision off of convenience rather than health knowledge. They may also choose which restaurant to eat at because of

entertainment. People go to s specific restaurant for the social aspect and in order to interact with others. Either

way, “consumers

fail to use their

knowledge of

health and diet

when making

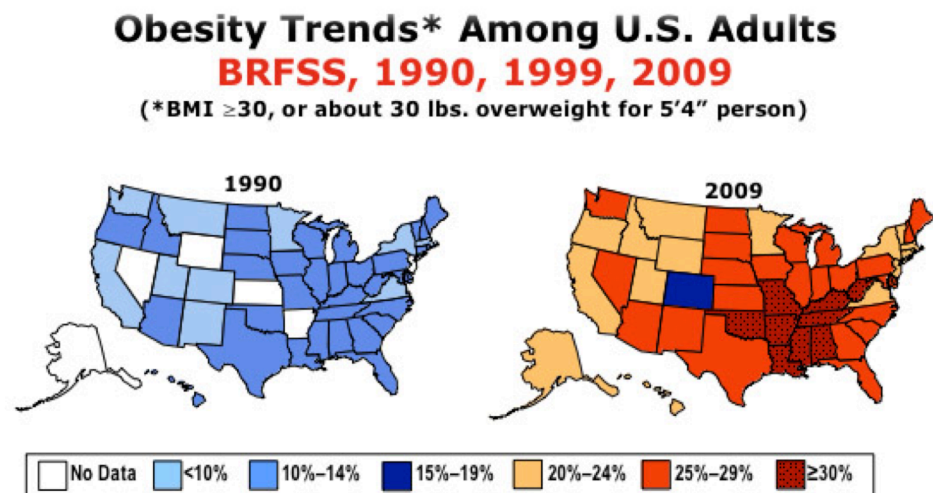
dining-out

decisions”

(Stewart, 2012, p.

5).

Image 1



Note: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System,

In coordination with people choosing unhealthy choices, the obesity rates have also skyrocketed. As Image 1 shows, twenty years ago America did not have nearly as many obese citizens as it currently does. In 1990 there were five states that didn't even have enough people that were thirty pounds overweight to record a percentage. A few years ago, in 2009, was a different story. The majority of the states had 25%-29% of their population considered obese. There were no states that couldn't record data and the lowest state still had 15% to 19% of their population considered obese. There were even 10 states that recorded greater than 30% of their citizens obese. These trends are really an eye opener and show that America is making poor health choices. As a result, the population has become more overweight and obese. How could this be if health education was also increasing? It just goes to show that people don't necessarily take in the information that they learn and continue to make the easy choices when it comes to their health instead of taking care of themselves as they have been taught.

There was a recent observation on people with significant body fat at the Murray Park and Recreation Center in Murray, Utah to see how many of its members were overweight (2012). Most people at the gym exercising at the Recreation Center were in somewhat good shape with the exception of 22 people with significant body fat. 15 for the 22 people were women. Most of the obese people were doing cardio- respiratory exercise. Some of the common machines that they were using were: The treadmill, stair steppers, elliptical, and free weights. Some were also playing volleyball, doing zumba, and refereeing volleyball as well. This study shows that there is a significant amount of overweight people in the community. Murray has a well-educated society for the most part and it just goes to show that even though people know about the dangers of being overweight, it is hard for them to change their lifestyles in order to get healthy. The overweight people that went to the gym were most likely going there for only a few times. They probably know that they are overweight and might try to change, but after time, they give up because it is too hard and requires too much effort. They know that it is unhealthy to be overweight, but cannot change because they are used to eating unhealthily and not exercising.

Obesity comes from the family. Serena Gordon (2008) reported that a family's life style has a greater impact on someone's chances to become obese. What the family eats together, what they do together, and what they spend time doing together. Obesity is a family issue as well.

There are not just a few causes for obesity in America today. One influence on obesity is Genetics. Our genes influence almost our entire lives: how we grow, what we look like and even obesity. Genes may cause obesity in severe cases. "Several rare forms of obesity result from spontaneous mutations in single genes, so called monogenic mutations. Such mutations have been discovered in genes that play and essential roles in appetite control, food intake, and energy homeostasis"" (Genes are not density, 2012 p.2). In 2007 researchers found a gene on

chromosome 16 that may increase the chances of having obesity. People who have this gene are 23 percent more likely to be obese. While some people may argue that genetics are the reason for the national surge of obesity, they are not. Being physically active can actually counteracted the affects of the genes. Active adults who carried the obesity-promoting gene had a 30 percent lower risk of obesity than inactive adults who carried the gene. Obesity itself requires a change in diet, lifestyle or other environmental factors. Some of the reasons why we have become obese are because of the availability of food at all times, decrease of physical activity, and time spent doing sedentary activities. All of these effects added up together have a change in diet and lifestyle, two of the things needed to cause obesity. “Genes may co-determine who becomes obese, but our environment determines how many become obese” (Health effects of obesity, 2009, p. 1).

As health awareness continues to rise and the rate of obesity fails to decrease, it is evident there is a need for change in our current system. Health education is a great method for making people more aware of the choices they are making. Unfortunately, health education alone isn't enough to stop the growing health problems in America. In order to help the US continue to be a powerful nation in the world President Bush put into place a program called, “No Child Left Behind.” Unfortunately, we soon learned that this was taking away from student's physical education and opportunity to stay physically active at school. Since more time has been spent in the classrooms, there has been less available time to be spent on the student's fitness. In the past kids would come home from school to ride bikes and play sports/games outside with their friends; in today's day and age kids come home and go directly to their Xbox, TV, and or computer for social networking. The reason there has been such a dramatic change in the activities kids have chosen to participate in is due to the fact, they haven't had the opportunity to

learn how to participate in different physical activities. Kid's viewpoint on physical education is a lot different than in years past. They view physical education more as a hassle than a fun break from school in today's day and age; this needs to change (No child left behind, 2011).

As a country, it is necessary to spend more time promoting healthy lifestyle choices in children's lives at an early age and reinforce it through the rest of their lives. Required full year classes such as gym, healthier food choices at lunch, eliminating soda and sugary foods in vending machines at schools, and promoting businesses to encourage their employees to leave work an hour a day to go to the gym will give the country the push it needs to get headed back on the right track. At first, there may be a loss of a little bit of money from a downturn in vending machines, more money being spent on physical education, and paid hour workout breaks but it will all pay for itself in the end by giving the country a more fit people. If citizens have rewards for keeping a healthy lifestyle they will strive to make the right choices and be more determined to keep themselves physically active. If people are given rewards such as health benefits for healthy eating, they will probably eat more healthy foods. If they know that there is a benefit out there for staying healthy, it will make it easier to do so. It is hard for people to make time for themselves to work out or participate in physical exertion so if there is a time provided to them by their work or school, they will be more likely to exercise more often. Without this time, Americans will continue to deny themselves of the exercise that they so desperately need. If Americans continue on the path that they are currently on, they will continue spending more money each year on preventable health related problems. There needs to be a change in the trend of unhealthy lifestyle choices to get back on the right track. Previous attempts have failed to change the trends of obesity and other health related problems. This plan that allows citizens to incorporate daily exercise into their lives and rewards them for eating healthily will be the best

option for making America a healthier place to live (Donatelle, 2009).

In conclusion, health education is a great way to get people informed about health issues, but not enough to actually affect their choices. The trends of obesity and overweight people continue to rise even though there is also an increase in health education. This means that educated individuals continue to make unhealthy choices when it comes to the food they eat because of convenience and their desire for a good tasting meal, which means lots of calories. People do not apply their knowledge of health because it is easier to make the unhealthy choices. It is extra work for someone to plan out their diet or find time to exercise. While individuals are educated about what will happen if they aren't able to make healthy choices, they continue to make the wrong decisions about their health. Americans need to step up and fight this epidemic harder. There needs to be actions that prevent people from making bad health decisions, reward them for making healthy choices, and allow people time to plan a healthy diet and exercise regularly. If this could be accomplished the rising trend of obesity could definitely be slowed down tremendously and who knows, maybe it could even be reversed completely in order to make our country healthier.

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